



Kilton Road
Six Bedford Farms, Suite 607
Bedford, New Hampshire 03110-6532
603 644-0888
FAX 603 644-2385

Meeting Notes

Attendees: See Attached List Date/Time: 9/06/01

Project No.: 50885

Place: Mclaughlin Middle School,
Manchester, NH Re: I-93 Salem to Manchester
Public Informational Meeting

Notes taken by: Bruce A. Tasker

Jeff Brillhart opened the meeting and made introductions. He explained that this meeting is one of five Public Informational meetings being held by the Department in each of the communities along the study section of I-93 from Salem to Manchester. This meeting focuses on the section of I-93 in Manchester beginning at the Londonderry/Manchester town line and running northerly to the I-93/I-293 split.

I-93 is a major interstate highway, and perhaps the major transportation link in NH. The Department is charged with improving the capacity and safety of an 18-mile section of I-93 that travels through 5 communities.

I-93 has a theoretical capacity to carry in the vicinity of 60,000 to 70,000 vpd. In the Salem area, the highway currently carries over 100,000 vpd and 70,000 in the Manchester area. By 2020, the projected volumes are approximately 140,000 vpd in Salem and 85,000 vpd in Manchester. The highway is over capacity today. Given the volume of vehicles on the highway, I-93 is less forgiving than it otherwise might be, and consequently less safe.

The Department is conducting the design and evaluation process using the format of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS follows five phases. The first phase or Scoping phase was completed in May 2000 with the publication of the Scoping Report. The second phase was completed in January 2001 with the publication of the Rationale Report. The Rationale Report documents the evaluation and screening of various alternatives. The recommendations in the Rationale Report include the following:

- Consider widening I-93 to be three lanes in each direction the entire length.
- Consider widening I-93 to be four lanes in each direction the entire length.
- Consider widening I-93 to be four lanes south of Exit 3 and three lanes north of Exit 3 in both directions.

- Construct park and ride lots at Exits 2, 3, and 5, and enhance the Exit 4 park and ride lot as appropriate.
- Expand existing bus service to Boston with stops at Exits 2, 3, and 5 as well as Exit 4.
- Enhance bus service by providing service between the NH park and ride lots and the industrial areas along I-93 in northern Massachusetts.
- Utilize Intelligent Transportation System Technology (ITS) and improve upon the Department's incident management capabilities.
- Incorporate TDM and TSM measures as practicable. The TSM would include short term, localized improvements to address immediate safety concerns and capacity improvements where possible. TDM measures include initiatives to encourage motorists to carpool, use bus service, telecommute, and otherwise make fewer trips, and thus reduce demand on the highway.

The Rationale Report also suggested that the Department not pursue the following:

- Constructing high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, as the ridership will not meet the threshold necessary to justify the lanes.
- Instituting rail service as part of this project. Ridership for any rail service would not diminish the need to widen the highway. However, the Report notes that rail service will in all likelihood be required in the future if NH is to maintain the level of mobility that is expected today. It is proposed that any widening of I-93 be done in such a manner as to retain the room for the possibility of a rail line in the highway corridor sometime in the future.

The Department is in the process of developing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. As the alternatives and plans become more defined and detailed we are evaluating the socio-economic and environmental impacts and costs for all the alternatives and comparing them against the No-build base line as well as against each other. Through this phase we are continuing to coordinate with and consider issues of concern identified by the all the stakeholders.

For example, bike trails along I-93 are now being considered as part of the widening layouts. A larger study of the north/south biking needs from the State Line to Concord will incorporate findings relative to the I-93 bike trail with consideration of using the abandoned rail corridor and roadway shoulders along other state and local roadways.

The Department continues to hold monthly meetings with the environmental resource agencies. These Agencies appear to recognize the need to widen I-93 and correct deficiencies associated with the existing infrastructure. The agencies feel that serious studies need to be carried forward now relative to rail service and some feel that perhaps these studies should be done as part of the current highway study and to the same degree of detail, as opposed to concurrently with the highway widening studies.

The Agencies also feel strongly that the improvements to I-93 will result in substantial secondary impacts to natural resources. That is, by improving I-93, NH becomes more accessible which entices more development for homes and businesses, which in turn impacts natural resources.

To address to what degree and where these secondary impacts might occur, the Department, at EPA's urging, is utilizing an Expert Panel to evaluate the issue. The panel of experts in the fields of land use, development and economic issues are being asked to answer questions relative to what the future might hold if I-93 is widened or not widened. Hopefully, the Panel will reach

some consensus or provide a range of possible scenarios so the Resource Agencies and the people of New Hampshire can understand the implications of widening I-93.

Another issue that is being considered is the possible implementation of ITS (Intelligent Transportation System) technologies that can improve the efficiency and incident management capabilities of the I-93 corridor. These system technologies will be identified for the I-93 corridor as part of a larger tri-state study being done by Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont known as the RATIS study. The RATIS study will identify measures that can be implemented by the three states to provide highway-users information about highway conditions before and during the trip. As part of these study efforts the Department, State Police, FHWA and local safety (police and fire) organizations meet regularly to consider what steps might be taken to improve incident management capabilities; that is, addressing accidents along I-93 in a more timely manner to minimize delays to motorists. This initiative is still in the early stages, but the communication has been very helpful and it appears that the efforts will result in very positive improvements for the motorists in terms of reducing delays along the highway due to accidents or incidents.

The Department is trying to coordinate with the State of Massachusetts and with the NH Congressional Delegation in an effort to conduct a more global study of the transportation needs of the region served by I-93 extending from Boston to Manchester. The study would concentrate on long-term needs and focus primarily on transit options. Having Massachusetts as a partner would allow for a more detailed discussion of the feasibility of the various transit alternatives.

Jeff also noted that the Department has been meeting with Massachusetts's officials to learn about their project to consider what might be done to improve the stretch of I-93 through Methuen and Andover where shoulders are allowed to carry traffic during peak travel periods. These officials are interested in a joint NH/MA study of the I-93 corridor and long term transit needs.

Jeff provided an overview of public feedback heard from the various local meetings. That feedback focused on the need to:

- Begin widening construction as soon as possible.
- Minimize impacts to private properties.
- Construct sound barriers to screen and shield neighborhoods.

Jeff also noted that the public, in a broad sense, feels that a 4-lane widening should be done vs. the 3-lane widening, with the idea that a 3-lane widening would require additional widening soon after the 3-lane widening is complete. The Resource Agencies appear to recognize the need to widen I-93 and correct the deficiencies associated with the existing infrastructure, however they may feel that I-93 should only be widened to 3-lanes. The Department has not made a decision at this time. The Department also recognizes that for a number of sections along the corridor, 4-lanes will need to be constructed at least to allow for two lanes of traffic in each direction during construction. For the 3-lane alternative the additional traffic control lane would be removed.

The individual towns have also expressed their particular concerns relative to how the project affects their communities.

For Salem a primary issue has been that the project not exacerbate the flooding that occurs in the Town and within the Spickett River watershed today.

For Windham and Salem, a predominant issue has been the need to address water quality and highway runoff, especially with Canobie Lake and Corbett's Pond located adjacent to the corridor. Windham is also very much interested in ways to reduce the overall footprint of the highway and the Exit 3 interchange. Today the existing median between the NB and SB barrels at the Exit 3

interchange is as much a 1,200 feet wide. Windham would like to see the interchange look more like Exit 2, 4 or 5 with much smaller footprints.

In Londonderry and Salem, the neighborhoods have expressed concern about the proposed park and ride lots and the impacts on their quality of life. Various alternatives or means of minimizing impacts are being considered.

Jeff noted that the plans are still very preliminary and are subject to change. The plans will be modified based on input the Department receives at the various meetings. There still needs to be quite a bit of design done before they are complete enough to fully address impacts.

Plan Presentation:

Tony noted that there are three interchange options for the Exit 5 interchange and that a Park and Ride is also being considered in the northwest quadrant of the interchange with access from Symmes Drive. Tony then described the 200 scale plans in more detail beginning at the Manchester /Londonderry Town line for the NB barrel and then the SB barrel.

North of the Exit 5 interchange in Londonderry, the layout for the NB barrel continues to hold the outside edge as a control with widening towards the median through the Londonderry/ Manchester Town Line where it begins to transition into the NHDOT's current Bodwell Road project construction improvements. The Bodwell Road project improvements are identified on the plans in orange, rather than the yellow and brown coloring used for the proposed design, to more clearly identify the limits of this current construction. The I-93 NB widening would match into the Bodwell Road project by adding width to the outside (easterly) edge of the NB barrel. The four NB travel lanes transition to five NB lanes south of the Bodwell Road bridge crossing to allow for traffic to connect to I-293 NB/NH 101 WB or continue north on I-93. The five lanes would be carried north to the I-93 NB/I-293 NB/NH 101 WB split where two NB lanes would diverge to the west and match into the existing two lanes for the I-293 NB/NH 101 WB connection and three NB lanes would continue northerly and match into the existing three I-93 NB travel lanes.

The SB barrel for I-93 is also widened to the outside (westerly) edge through the Londonderry/Manchester Town Line where it then transitions into the current Bodwell Road improvements. Similar to the NB barrel, the I-93 widening would match the SB barrel into the current construction work by widening to the outside (westerly side) of the SB barrel. Two SB travel lanes from I-293 SB/NH 101 EB would merge with three travel lanes from I-93 SB, north of the Bodwell Road bridge crossing. The five lanes would be carried south over the Bodwell Road bridge crossing and then transition to four travel lanes. If the three lane option is chosen as the build alternative then the four lane section would continue southerly for approximately 0.25 miles and then transition to the three lane section.

Sound Barriers

Noise barrier locations currently being evaluated in Manchester include three locations along the NB barrel:

- Newton's Meadow Way
- An area just south of the Bodwell Road underpass
- An area just south of Island Pond Road

Property Acquisitions

No homes or businesses will need to be acquired as part of the highway improvements through the Manchester segment.

Jeff Brillhart noted that the project is continuing on schedule. Another series of Public Informational Meetings will be held in November of this year and also in March and April of next year just prior to the public hearing in May. At the November meetings the Department will identify which alternative it feels best meets the purpose and need of the project.

Comments/Questions:

Comment: Are you still proposing to widen the highway towards the median behind Newton's Meadow Way?

Tony Grande: Yes, but in order to build the soundwall some work will need to be done on the east side of the highway towards Newton's Meadow Way.

Comment: What is the price for the total project projected to be?

Jeff Brillhart: It is currently projected to be \$250 million.

Comment: Does that cost estimate include any of the rail portion?

Jeff Brillhart: No, it does not include building the rail. Where it makes sense to remove ledge to allow for the rail that would be done. For traffic control, we may have to over-widen the road, and perhaps over-widen it toward the median, where the rail would eventually go. The new bridges will accommodate space for the future rail. Essentially the stage will be set for the possibility of the rail in the future, but we are not proposing to build a rail as part of this project.

Comment: Does anyone have an estimate as to how much it would cost to construct the rail?

Jeff Brillhart: A planning study was completed and reports were published last December, which discuss the different rail options costs and ridership. I don't have a cost figure with me, but it is available. One option was to construct the rail in the I-93 corridor. The second option would be continuing the rail service from Lowell through Nashua up to Manchester, and the third option would be to upgrade the old Manchester to Lawrence Line. The conclusions are that the rail wouldn't eliminate the need to widen the highway. We see the eventuality of rail coming to this region. Another transit study needs to be done in conjunction with Massachusetts. We are working with Massachusetts right now to implement that type of study and get a rail initiative started.

Comment: So, 30 years from now, one of those rail lines will probably be developed; either the one along Route 3 or along I-93?

Tony Grande: There is currently a project to extend rail service up to Nashua and the next logical step would be to continue up through Merrimack and then up to Manchester.

Jeff Brillhart: The problem with the Nashua corridor is that it is not going to do much to satisfy the needs of the people that live along the I-93 corridor. It is a good project in its own right and is probably the first step to bring commuter rail service back into New Hampshire. Eventually we need to determine where the rail service should go for the immediate vicinity of I-93.

Comment: When you expand I-93 to three or four lanes in either direction, at what point do you expect to reach congestion levels that are comparable to today? When will this project be completed?

Jeff Brillhart: In the Salem area, we anticipate reaching the current level of service in 20 years. We expect this project to be completed by 2010.

Comment: So, ten years after it is done, in 2020, we are going to have the same type of driving experience that we have today?

- Jeff Brillhart: No. We are talking about level-of-service, which is one way of measuring the highway capacity and congestion. With four lanes rather than two lanes, the highway will be quite a bit safer. North of Salem the widening will address capacity needs further into the future.
- Bruce Tasker: Right now the peak period of congestion is approximately three hours. So, for three hours today, SB in the AM and NB in the PM, it is very congested, especially in the Salem area. If you expand to four lanes by adding two lanes in each direction to the existing two lanes, then on opening day, the level-of-service will be great. Traffic will be able to flow. But, as traffic builds in the future, congestion will approach what you have today in the peak hour, but the peak period won't be the three hours that you see today. In the year 2020 (which is the limit of our study) the total peak period will be more like a peak hour, but beyond that, perhaps in 2025 or 2030, the peak period could be back to that three hours. Rail or some other type of transit will be needed to be sure we don't get to that level of congestion again. We need to work with Massachusetts now to plan for our transportation needs in the future.
- Comment: What is the status of a bike path?
- Jeff Brillhart: We are currently looking at opportunities to provide options along the I-93 corridor. We need to determine what the consequences and the ramifications are, where it would go, and what it would look like if it was built right along I-93. There is a larger study being conducted that will be looking at bike path opportunities all the way up to Concord.
- Comment: How can one get more involved with Bike Paths?
- Jeff Brillhart: The Department has a bicycle coordinator who can be found at the Department's Bureau of Transportation Planning. There is a federal program involving transportation enhancement funds to upgrade our bicycle facilities. Also, there are bicycle groups that regularly help the Department plan for bike facilities statewide.
- Comment: What about wetland mitigation areas in Manchester?
- Jeff Brillhart: We need to work with the City to come up with a list of sites and present those sites at the Public Hearing. We need feedback from the City and the Resource agencies as to which sites provide the best mitigation.
- Comment: When does the Department want input relative to possible sites?
- Jeff Brillhart: The input can be anytime. Call me or write a letter. The Department's specialist is Marc Laurin, who is working with VHB, the project consultant. For the wetland mitigation sites that we are currently building in Salem and Londonderry, we went through a fairly lengthy search for mitigation sites. Not all sites provide the necessary mitigation.
- Comment: Will the Department replace the trees that are cut around the various properties?
- Jeff Brillhart: We generally do some landscaping with our projects. Typically if you are in a more urban area we would look at more landscaping (that would be done after the highway construction is completed) to bring a nice look to the area. What we will do along I-93, at this time, is uncertain. Through the interchanges, we probably will provide more landscaping.
- Comment: Will the sound barriers mentioned be constructed before the actual construction for I-93 begins?

- Jeff Brillhart: Where we can build sound barriers first, we will try to do that. I would encourage you to make that same request at the Public Hearing.
- Comment: When these plans are finalized and approved, is there a place where the public can review these plans? Will these plans be published and put in the library or state office?
- Jeff Brillhart: You can always call the Department and we will make arrangements so you can see the plans and if there is a particular concern, we will be happy to meet with you and talk about it. When we have plans that are pretty much complete, we would provide the City with copies of the plans so that they would be available to the public for review. We also have a website (it does not have the plans because of space requirements) that contains all the documents that have been published thus far.
- Comment: My concern was that if I couldn't make it to the public meeting and I wanted to see the plans, where I could go to view them.
- Jeff Brillhart: If you give us a call, we will make arrangements to make sure you see what you need to see, one way or another.
- Comment: Regarding the Sunoco at Exit 5, just for the record I want to state that the plans showing the realignment of the driveway to the proposed traffic lights at Liberty Drive is quite acceptable to my company.
- Jeff Brillhart: We recognized your concerns and they are being considered relative to what we are thinking about. There are also environmental impacts that need to be considered and in this case, they will play into what you would like to see happen. I think we are headed in the right direction. The decision hasn't been made yet, but we are aware of your concern.
- Comment: With respect to the bus line Concord Trailways, how will they service the park and ride at Exit 5?
- Jeff Brillhart: Our Bureau of Rail and Transit is working with them to come up with what is needed in terms the number of buses and the type of service. We need to expand the number of buses on I-93 if we are going to have expanded and enhanced bus services.
- Comment: How long will this project take once it is underway?
- Jeff Brillhart: Six to ten years. This project is our highest priority.
- Comment: I am very concerned because my backyard abuts the east side of the highway right next to the bridge and the traffic is very loud. I am curious as to how long you think it will be before a final decision is made on sound barriers and how is that decision determined?
- Charlie Hood: Along I-93 there are areas that are considered to be impacted by highway traffic noise. Impacted means the area experiences 66 decibels of noise or higher either now or in the future 20 year timeframe. We then evaluate noise barriers to reduce the noise level in those areas. We check to see if a barrier can physically fit and it's impact to historic properties, wetlands, etc. We look at how long the barriers have to be and how high they have to be to provide at least a 5 decibel reduction in noise for the residents in the area. Once that is completed, we take the number of homes who will benefit from having a barrier and divide it into the cost to construct the barrier. Where the cost for construction is \$30,000 or less per home, then our economic criteria is met. The Department has a noise policy in keeping with the Federal Highway Administration noise guidelines.

Comment: I understand the barriers are going to be installed at an angle to the noise. Can you tell me how that works, and if there isn't a wall per se, would landscaping trees help some of the noise as well.

Charlie Hood: Usually plantings and landscaping would need to be 100 feet deep, 15 feet high, 100 feet long, and very dense (so you can't see through it), to maybe get a 5 decibel reduction in noise. A row or two of trees really doesn't do a whole lot from a noise point of view. Psychologically the vegetation might be helpful. The barriers we have constructed thus far in New Hampshire are concrete posts with pressure treated wood panels. The noise does reflect off of those. Some people have a concern that the noise reflects back and makes it worse across the highway. That really wouldn't be the case even though you might perceive it as that.

Comment: I am on the mailing list along with other people. How do we ensure that we know when the next meetings are?

Jeff Brillhart: Any property owner that received a letter regarding this meeting will get a letter for future meetings. If anyone wants to get on the mailing list, please see me. You can also check the website for meeting schedules.

Comment: What is the scheduled completion date for the Bodwell Road project.

Jeff Brillhart: I believe it is 1 to 1 ½ years from now.

Comment: Have you heard of any environmental type issues like eagles that may delay the project?

Jeff Brillhart: In Salem, we have to deal with flooding impacts to make sure we are not going to make that situation worse. That is going to require purchasing properties and making floodplains out of them so the widening into floodplains doesn't worsen the situation down there. Hopefully, when we are all done, it will actually improve the situation. Another major issue is we have anywhere from 55 to 65 acres of wetland impact with this layout. Another issue that is harder to get a handle on is the issue of Secondary Impacts. The Environmental Protection Agency and our own New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, has put that issue in the forefront of issues of concern to them. Another issue is the need to study rail service for the I-93 corridor. We recognize that need and we are trying to work with Massachusetts.

Comment: When you start the project, are you going north to south; south to north; or sporadic.

Jeff Brillhart: To get going, we will probably work in areas where we don't have to buy any right-of-way. Buying right-of-way is a time consuming process because we need to address property owner concerns. My sense would be that we will start with the park and ride lots so that we can have that mode of transportation available during construction. We also would probably start widening and constructing bridges because of the long lead-time they take to construct. Overall, our preference would be to start in Salem and work our way north.

Comment: Are you planning on purchasing a lot of land?

Jeff Brillhart: There will be land acquired as part of the layout. In areas we will be widening to the outside of the corridor and it might spill over onto private properties. In order to have room to build some of the sound barriers, we will need to buy private property. In the interchange areas, we will be buying private property because of the local and secondary road improvement. An exact number of right-of-way impacts has not been determined at this time. At our next meeting we should have spreadsheets to discuss where the impacts will be in terms of right-of-way and what the impacts will be in terms of wetlands in Manchester.